

What is a Press Release?

The press release is the most basic and widely used public relations technique. Press releases come in many forms, but no matter the message, make sure it has a “news angle.” A press release without news value will likely be dismissed or ignored. Travel writers need press releases, but make sure to give them information they need. They are inundated with releases from all over the world and you have to make sure your release does not get lost in the shuffle.

The following are different types of press releases:

- **Standard Release:** This release follows the “journalism pyramid” of trying to get as much information in the first sentence and paragraph, with more detailed information following. The first paragraph should answer: Who, what, where, why, when and how. The following paragraphs will fill in the details. When writing a standard release, assume that the journalist might only read the first few paragraphs, so anything that is at the bottom of the release should be of less importance in case it is never read.
- **Feature Release:** This release opens with a “grabber” – an attention getting sentence designed to “hook” the reader into being interested in the rest of the story. The success or failure of the release depends on the first “hook” sentence, which must create questions and interest in the reader’s mind. All the same questions, “who, what, where, why, when and how,” must still be answered in the release.
- **Media Advisory:** This release dispenses with any type of narrative and just presents the facts as cleanly as possible. This release is generally employed when announcing a press conference or some type of event. A media advisory is most useful when attempting to present information to broadcast media in a clear and concise manner. Usually, the release consists of a left column that has simply, “Who, What, Where, Why and When” with a brief paragraph for each category giving the facts. In addition to the above categories, you might also include “Photo Opportunities,” “Visuals” and “Interviews.” The entire point of this release is to provide detailed information about a complicated event in as simple a manner as possible. You want the media to attend this event, so include all the information you can to entice them, including who will be there that they can interview, what type of photos or video they will be able to get, etc.
- **Backgrounder Release:** This release also dispenses with a flowing narrative and simply presents the facts in categories. It is designed to make it easy for the journalist to find simple facts without having to read and reread through a long release. Frequently, a feature release will be accompanied by a “backgrounder” release so that the feature hooks the reporter’s interest and

the backgrounder makes it easy for him or her to write his story by presenting all the facts in a quick reference. The type of facts on this release might include: name of company, when founded, how much business is done, type of business done, how large business is, why there is a news story, who works there, description of the business, etc.

The following items **MUST** be included on every press release:

1. The date on which the story was prepared
2. A contact name for the media to receive more information
3. A phone number for the general public to call and an address for more information. If the contact person relies heavily on e-mail, an e-mail address can be included as well.
4. All pages must be numbered and a marker (either -30- or ###) must indicate when the release ends. All pages should have the title of the release and the page number in the upper right hand corner because pages sometimes get separated.

Here are some tips for generating ideas for and writing press releases:

- At the beginning of each calendar or fiscal year, create a press release schedule. Brainstorm about possible release topics that are appropriate for your tourism product– holiday values, fall colors, summer festivals, etc. Keep in mind that the release should be sent out about three months in advance. Here are some additional ways to generate interesting story angles:
 - **A Local Twist on National Events:** Tying into holidays and national observances is a great way to promote local attractions. For instance, if National Family Week is in May, create a roundup of special events and attractions in your community related to families.
 - **Editorial Calendars:** When compiling the media list, be sure to ask the publications for their editorial calendars, which is an outline of the major stories and features planned in the upcoming year. If your product fits into a certain story they have planned, draft a press release and send it to the publication in a timely manner, keeping their deadlines in mind. Knowing the publication's editorial plans enhances the chances of being included in the story.
 - **Numbers:** One of the easiest ways to grab an editor or producer's attention is to have a "Top 10" or "10 Ways to..." release. This gives the editor or producer a broad look at an organization, all neatly presented on one piece of paper.
 - **Brag:** If your organization receives an award or an accolade, don't be afraid to toot your own horn. Writing a press release about a special recognition keeps your organization top of mind for residents, visitors and decision makers.
 - **Write the Release for the Publication or News Station:** This tactic is particularly successful with the broadcast media. Write a media advisory that essentially outlines the segment, as it should appear on the news station. Creating a visual image of how the segment will run for the

producer decreases the amount of research he or she has to do and increases the chances the pitch will get picked up.

- Always think about how something can be turned into a press release. Don't stretch it to write about something that is not newsworthy, but be on the look out for potential releases. Awards, new hires and interesting programs are all examples of good subjects for press releases.
- Make the lead (first sentence) direct and to the point. Editors often make judgments about the value of the release within the first two sentences. Make them want to keep reading.
- Use short sentences and paragraphs and keep everything brief and to the point. Don't try to show off vocabulary, use common language.
- Write the release assuming the reader has no prior knowledge of the topic.
- Make all quotes conversational. If you write how you would talk, the release will be much easier to read.
- Use the phrase "For Immediate Release" indicating that the editor can publish it immediately, or whenever they wish. Delay sending the release out if it cannot be published as soon as it is received.
- Double-check everything for accuracy. Check phone numbers, addresses, times – it can be disastrous when incorrect information is published. Assume that editors will publish the release as written and not take the time to fact check.
- Limit the release to two pages – it is possible to say everything in plenty of detail in less than two pages.
- Follow the Associated Press style of writing news releases. *The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* is available at many bookstores and web sites (www.amazon.com) and is a great investment if you plan on writing press releases.

Sending a Press Release

- It is generally acceptable to e-mail a press release, unless the writer has specifically indicated that he or she prefers not to receive correspondence electronically. Always paste the text of the release in the body of the e-mail – NEVER send it as an attachment. Freelance writers often work on their home computers and will not open attachments for fear of receiving a virus.
- Indicate that images are available upon request as opposed to sending them as attachments.
- If you are mailing the release, take the time to find the correct name of the travel editor, rather than just to the title, "Travel Editor." Almost all travel editors report that they divide their mail into two categories: those addressed to them personally, and those addressed to "travel editor." Obviously, they are more likely to pay attention to a release that is addressed to them personally. On the other hand, if the correct name is not available, it is safer to address it to "Travel Editor" as opposed to the wrong contact.
- Some travel writers appreciate a personal note and will be more receptive to a release if accompanied by a note or letter. This is particularly effective when suggesting a department in the publication where the information is

relevant. This shows you did your homework and are familiar with the publication, thereby giving you credibility.

- In most cases, do not fax the release to travel editors. It ties up their fax lines and runs the risk of it never getting delivered to the correct person. Unless the writer is on deadline, it is best to mail the release.
- Be mindful of deadlines. Newspapers work one to two months ahead of time and magazines work six to nine months ahead of time. If you are preparing a release for summer, have the materials ready before March or April to make many of the magazine sections. This is when a press release schedule comes in handy.